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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wednesday, October 15, 2003

Congress Authorizes Transfer of \$9.7 Million To Benefit DOE's Worker Compensation Program

WASHINGTON, DC – At the request of the Department of Energy (DOE), key congressional committees have authorized DOE to transfer \$9.7 million to the Department of Energy's Office of Environment, Safety and Health to benefit the workers compensation program. The additional funding will be used to expedite the processing of applications submitted to DOE under Part D of the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program Act (EEOICPA), enacted by Congress in 2000.

"We appreciate the work of all members of Congress supporting our efforts to improve the workers compensation program, including Congressmen David Hobson, Duncan Hunter, Ike Skelton and Pete Visclosky and Senators Pete Domenici, John Warner, Harry Reid and Carl Levin," said Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham. "Providing more resources to the Department will allow us to process workers' claims more efficiently."

"We are firmly committed to help former workers who performed an important service for this country, to receive the benefits they deserve," Assistant Secretary for Environment, Safety and Health Beverly Cook said. "Processing these claims is a labor intensive process that involves gathering employment records, establishing relevant work histories for each employee, and collecting medical records for former workers who file claims."

The DOE will invest the \$9.7 million in both the field, collecting workers' records, and in the case processing operation, assembling cases for physician panels. Approximately half of the funds will be put to work at the DOE sites to collect workers' dose and medical records, and collect facility specific information relating to worker exposures. The other half will be put to work in the DOE case processing operation, hiring approximately 30 more case processing personnel and associated costs.

Ten resource centers have been set up by DOE and the Department of Labor (DOL) near DOE facilities across the country to help workers file applications. In addition, DOE and DOL have manned Traveling Resource Centers with visits to 18 additional locations around the country. The offices and traveling resource centers assist workers in filing claims, gathering information about their work history, and other work related records necessary to file a claim for review.

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Part D of the EEOICPA law allows DOE to assist former contractor workers in applying for state workers compensation. DOE compiles employee health and medical records. An independent physician panel reviews an employee's work and medical history and determines whether on-the-job toxic exposure contributed to an employee's illness. DOE assists employees in filing for state workers compensation if their cases have been verified and accepted by the physician panel. Benefits for successful claimants vary from state to state, but are generally a portion of lost wages plus reimbursement of medical costs. The law applies only to contractor workers at DOE facilities.

The law allows DOE to provide assistance to contract workers (or their survivors) who worked for DOE or its predecessor agencies (Atomic Energy Commission).

Separately, the Department of Labor (DOL) administers a portion of the law (Part B) that provides \$150,000 and payment of medical expenses for employees or their qualified survivors who became ill by their exposure to radiation, beryllium or silica at covered nuclear weapons facilities. Conditions covered under DOL's portion of the program are cancers caused by radiation, diseases caused by exposure to the metal beryllium, and chronic silicosis caused by exposure to silica during mining operations.

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